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FOR ACTION

RECOMMENDATION TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Interregional programme for children in especially difficult circumstances

SUMMARY

The Executive Director recommends that the Executive Board approve an interregional programme for children in especially difficult circumstances for the period 1991 to 1993 in the amount of $900,000 from general resources, subject to the availability of funds, and an amount of $2.5 million in supplementary funds, subject to the availability of specific-purpose contributions. This support is needed to accelerate UNICEF programme development and strengthen the capacities of the organization's global and regional partners to reach the 1990s goal of improved protection and services for children in especially difficult circumstances and to deal with the underlying causes.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Executive Board established UNICEF policies on children in especially difficult circumstances in 1986, including working and street children, children in emergencies and armed conflict and abused and neglected children (decision 1986/12, E/ICEF/1986/12). The Board requested UNICEF to "develop an implementation strategy with special attention to improved staff training and appropriate allocation of resources and staff time within the framework of its mandate to undertake activities relating to children in especially difficult circumstances, taking into account its priorities and overall resource situation, and the need for UNICEF to concentrate mainly on advocacy and to rely primarily on Governments and voluntary agencies for implementation". The Board also urged all countries to consider increasing their contributions to UNICEF to enable the organization to undertake expanded programme activities with regard to children in especially difficult circumstances, and UNICEF to seek specific-purpose contributions, where appropriate, for projects in the area.

2. Recent trends and events have resulted in increasing attention being focused on the protection of children and have placed increasing demands on UNICEF for a higher level of response to children in especially difficult circumstances. The passage of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its ratification by more than 70 Governments obligates these Governments and all organizations of the United Nations system, particularly UNICEF, to implement the Convention, which gives specific emphasis to the protection of children in especially difficult circumstances. The World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s, adopted by the World Summit for Children, reinforce the commitment of world leaders and organizations of the United Nations system to protect these children.

I. BACKGROUND

3. UNICEF has assisted projects and programmes for street children in Brazil and other Latin American countries and the Philippines since the early 1980s. A nation-wide, locally financed street children movement in Brazil has led to the explicit inclusion of children's rights in the national constitution and has raised world-wide awareness, inspiring many projects and movements for street children in Latin America, Asia and Africa. This rapid spread of action on behalf of street children is a result of effective collaboration between UNICEF and local and regional non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Already, 27 countries have UNICEF-assisted programmes for street children. Only 10 such programmes are outside the Latin America region, however, and much more needs to be done in other regions as the numbers of street children in Africa, South Asia and the Middle East continue to increase.

4. Child labour has not yet been as effectively addressed by Governments or UNICEF-assisted programmes. UNICEF has cooperated closely with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and NGOs to raise public awareness, develop training materials, encourage situation studies and advocate policies and programmes that go beyond legislation and enforcement to prohibit child work. Country programme initiatives in Latin America and in Egypt, the Philippines and Thailand have included extending non-formal education and services to working children, encouraging NGO projects for protected and creative work alternatives for children who must work, and strengthening enforcement of child labour regulations through joint government and NGO action. Child labour has increased as a result of economic recession and adjustment programmes in Africa and Latin America, and as a result of rapid industrialization and urbanization in all developing countries. A substantial increase in programmes to respond to this growing problem is required.

5. The numbers of armed conflicts and disasters are rising, particularly in Africa, and the effects on children's health and psycho-social development have been devastating. UNICEF has always responded rapidly and effectively to the emergency needs of children in such situations, and has recently been recognized for its role in negotiating "corridors of peace" in Operation Lifeline Sudan and "days of peace" for immunization in El Salvador and Lebanon. Less widely known, but no less important, are efforts to reunite children and parents in Mozambique; projects to reduce the effects of psycho-social trauma on children in Mozambique, Lebanon, the Philippines and Sri Lanka and in Central America; disability prevention and rehabilitation of children and youth in Afghanistan and Ethiopia; and peace education in Lebanon. The long-term solution to these problems requires programmes that permanently rehabilitate and reorient children to resolve conflicts peacefully and to understand and practise environmentally sound development. More sharing and replication of the many local initiatives responding to children in armed conflicts and disasters are also needed.

6. Child abuse and neglect is a world-wide problem, but it has become a major public concern only in industrialized countries, and recently in newly industrialized countries such as Brazil, Malaysia and the Republic of Korea. Studies on the relationship of child abuse to violence in society, drug and alcohol abuse and armed conflict indicate that child abuse needs to be addressed on an international level, as well as on national and local levels. Few country programmes have begun to address this problem except in the context of institutionalized children. Again, Latin America has taken the lead in programmes to open and humanize institutions for abandoned or delinquent children. UNICEF is working with the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect in support of its international congresses and seminars, and more importantly, in the establishment of regional and national organizations in developing countries, such as the African Network for Protection and Prevention against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN). This area of work is also of great concern in industrialized countries and needs to be addressed by National Committees for UNICEF in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

7. Except in the Latin America region, the UNICEF response to the problems of children in especially difficult circumstances has been limited by the lack of resources and experienced programme staff for situation analyses and programme development. More resources are needed to develop good programmes for services and protection, particularly in Africa and Asia. Programmes are also needed to monitor, conduct research and evaluations, raise public awareness and advocate policy changes to prevent an increase in the numbers of children in especially difficult circumstances.

II. PROPOSED ACTION

8. In accordance with Executive Board decision 1986/12, it is proposed that substantially more support be given to national and regional NGOs working in support of children in especially difficult circumstances, including, but not limited to, ANPPCAN, the Environment and Development Association in West Africa, the Undugu Society in East Africa, Child Workers in Asia, Childhope's regional networks for street children and the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. This support would help to strengthen NGO networks and to improve their capacities to disseminate information, to guide local situation studies, to facilitate inter-country exchanges of experience and to provide training and technical advisory services. Strong regional networks and national associations of NGOs constitute a cost-effective means of raising public awareness, advocating policy changes and supporting situation analyses and new project development. Furthermore, as these networks and their members develop a fund-raising capacity, they will become self-reliant institutions to support and advocate for children in difficult circumstances.

9. UNICEF headquarters and regional offices also require additional support to expand their capacities to provide technical assistance to country offices for situation analyses, project development, programme advice and monitoring and evaluation of programmes for children in especially difficult circumstances. At present, only the Latin America region has a regional adviser for children in especially difficult circumstances and headquarters has only one core senior adviser post. Therefore, both headquarters and regional offices must rely heavily on outside consultants to support programming in this area. However, funds for consultancies are limited, and frequently country offices cannot allocate funds for programme development in the area of children in especially difficult circumstances if the host Government does not consider it a high priority.

10. Inter-country exchanges of experience are extremely important as a means of expanding programmes. Regional and interregional training and programming workshops not only facilitate immediate and direct exchanges of methods and techniques, they also help to create and sustain a network of UNICEF staff working in the area of children in especially difficult circumstances at the country level.

11. Publications on methods and programme examples, such as those published by the Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean, need to be developed on a global basis for each category of children in especially difficult circumstances and disseminated to all country offices. In cooperation with media organizations, NGO networks and country offices, UNICEF will also help to raise public awareness by encouraging and supporting the popular press to publish articles on all aspects of the subject. Although many videos and films are produced by broadcast media, NGOs and Governments on various aspects of children in especially difficult circumstances, their reproduction and distribution is limited and unsystematic. UNICEF, in cooperation with NGO networks, will help to develop an improved system for reproducing and disseminating these films and videos.

12. Development education materials for use in both industrialized and developing countries will be encouraged and supported through cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), NGO networks, national education programmes, National Committees for UNICEF and country offices. Efforts will be made to incorporate environmental and peace education, as well as information on street children, child labour and child abuse and neglect in national and local education curricula, including non-formal education specifically directed to children in especially difficult circumstances.

III. INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION

13. Most of the above activities will be carried out in cooperation with national Governments, appropriate organizations of the United Nations system and NGOs. Specific cooperation with the United Nations agencies envisioned or already under way includes the following:

(a) ILO: joint development of training materials on child labour; regional meetings on child labour in Asia and Latin America in 1991; international symposium on child labour in 1992; and development of a mechanism to monitor child labour globally;

(b) UNESCO: support for non-formal education for child workers and for development education materials on environment, peace, child abuse and neglect and working and street children;

(c) Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): development and dissemination of a handbook for field workers dealing with children in armed conflict situations;

(d) Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations Office at Vienna: support and mobilization for the Year of the Family in 1994, particularly regarding the issue of family breakdown and the role of fathers in families and child-rearing;

(e) Centre for Human Rights, United Nations Office at Geneva: support for monitoring the implementation of the articles relating to the protection of children in especially difficult circumstances in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

14. To initiate, supervise and monitor effectively the activities described above, it will be necessary to support in part several project posts within UNICEF. However, the use of NGOs and consultants will be the principal working method, as appropriate.

15. Therefore, the Executive Director recommends that the Executive Board approve an interregional programme for children in especially difficult circumstances for the period 1991-1993 in the amount of $900,000 from general resources, subject to the availability of funds, to support several project posts and costs associated with consultants' fees, travel and staff training, and an amount of $2.5 million in supplementary funds, subject to the availability of specific-purpose contributions, to support the above-mentioned activities.

Estimated annual expenditure

(In thousands of United States dollars)

Funding source	1991	1992	1993	Total
General resources	200	350	350	900
Supplementary funds	700	900	900	2 500
Total	900	1 250	1 250	3 400